

From The Province

June 5, 2008

<http://www.canada.com/theprovince/news/story.html?id=5a4a5da3-5ce7-4268-a7dd-c3994cfefac5>

## Top in Trades

Name: Melissa Craig

Category: Women in Trades

Age: 28

Town: Whistler

Trade: Cook

Current job: Executive Chef

Employer: Bearfoot Bistro

Years in the trade: 10

Education: Malaspina University-College; Camosun College

Why would someone want a career as a cook? "It allows you to be very creative. It's also very gratifying -- when you feed someone, you make them happy."

Why did you nominate Melissa for this award? "She constantly strives for high standards, and is a great supporter of local producers and community events. She employs several women and is a great leader as well as a great inspiration for all young cooks."

-- Gilbert Noussitou, Melissa's former instructor

When she was 10, Melissa Craig made Caesar salads with her own secret ingredient for family dinners. As a teen, she enjoyed feeding her family, taking cooking classes in high school and watching food shows on TV.

But when she was deciding what to pursue after Grade 12, she didn't think about becoming a chef.

"I was going to go to school to be an elementary-school teacher," said Craig, who was raised in Duncan on Vancouver Island. "Then right before I started college -- I was already enrolled -- I changed to cooking.

"I don't know what made me do it, but it was the best decision I could have made."

She began her training as a cook at Malaspina University College, making breakfast on weekends at a little café in Duncan to help pay her way through school. When it was time to begin her apprenticeship, Craig moved to Sooke to work in the kitchen of the renowned Sooke Harbour House and finished her schooling at Camosun College.

"It was a great experience," she said. "It was all local, seasonal, regional food and everything was done from scratch. That first year, I cleaned a lot of fish."

In 2001, she competed in a national competition for apprentices and won, becoming Canada's top apprentice of the year.

After finishing her four-year apprenticeship, Craig left Sooke and spent a season at a high-end fishing resort on B.C.'s coast, then spent a year in Australia.

"I cooked the whole time, first in a restaurant in Sydney and then in a couple of different smaller restaurants along the east coast," she said. "And I ate everywhere. Experiencing all that food was eye-opening."

When she returned to Duncan, she knew she didn't want to stay on Vancouver Island.

"I was about to start at Lumiere, but the Bearfoot Bistro contacted me and I went up for an interview and it all went from there."

Instead of working at one of Vancouver's top restaurants, Craig chose the sous chef position at the five-star restaurant in Whistler. That was four years ago. Now she's executive chef.

This year, the 28-year-old won the National Gold Plate Award in the 2008 Canadian Culinary Championship, beating some of the country's best chefs for the honour.

She works long days in the kitchen.

"I've worked really hard at my trade, but a lot has come out of it. It's all falling into place."